

Undertaker goes over big

In some cases, it's the wrestler who makes the gimmick. In others, it's the gimmick that makes the wrestler.

A prime example of the latter is Mark Calaway. The 6-foot-7½, 305-pound Calaway — as the blank-expressed Undertaker — has become the World Wrestling Federation's hottest new performer. Undertaker, who seemingly feels no pain, wins his matches with a hold called the tombstone (a reverse piledriver) and stuffs his hapless foes into body bags after beating them.



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BY DAVE MELTZER
FOR THE NATIONAL

With manager Paul Bearer (the ex-Percival Pringle III, who really has worked as a mortician), Undertaker has become the most-talked-about character in wrestling.

To hype a series of matches against Ultimate Warrior, Undertaker and Bearer were involved in one of the heaviest gimmicks in recent years.

At a late-March taping of WWF's syndicated TV show, Undertaker attacked Warrior and stuffed him into a "locked" coffin — where he remained for several minutes while supposedly panic-stricken WWF agents and TV announcers gave the impression he was suffocating. When the coffin was opened, an agent appeared to administer mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and CPR.

On April 15 in Omaha during a Warrior-Sgt. Slaughter match (which airs on this week's NBC Saturday Night Main Event special), Undertaker came out of a coffin Bearer brought to ringside and attacked Warrior. Undertaker's gimmick — like that of Zeus two years ago — is acting as if moves attempted on him have no effect. So Undertaker stood still as Warrior tried to fight back, but the combination of Undertaker, Slaughter, General Adnan and Colonel Mustafa had Warrior in a bad way until Hulk Hogan saved the day.

Attesting to Undertaker's popularity is the fact that the crowd was solidly behind him in his first match against the extremely popular Warrior, on April 13 in Auburn Hills, Mich. Although the response has been more mixed in other cities, it's the first time a sizable percentage of fans has cheered Warrior's villainous opponent.

The Undertaker is just the latest name and persona for the 29-year-old Texan. Among his monikers have been Texas Red (for his red hair), The Master of Pain (for the USWA in Tennessee), The Punisher (as a masked man in Texas), Punisher Dice Morgan (in Japan), and Mean Mark Callous (in World Championship Wrestling).

But most felt he never would make it as a main eventer because he lacked facial expressions. After Calaway quit WCW last October, WWF promoter Vince McMahon devised what seems to be a perfect gimmick to take advantage of that weakness.

ETC: WCW has pulled Sid Vicious off all previously scheduled house shows except the May 19 PPV "SuperBrawl," on which he'll face El Gigante. According to WWF officials, Vicious will join that promotion this summer. . . . Hulk Hogan-Sgt. Slaughter rematches will be billed as Desert Storm matches — the only way to win is by the unconditional surrender of your opponent.

Chad

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